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Case # NLJ 95-28
Document # 10

8 February 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Meeting at the White House 7 February 1964

1. At 5 p.m. the same group plus Secretary Rusk, Mr. Ball, Mr. Nitze, Mr. Donald Wilson, USIA, and Mr. Theodore Sorensen met with the President. Mr. McCone commenced with a briefing of the facts which had been established as follows: First, Cuban public statements, press releases and broadcasts have in the last ten days featured the Guantanamo issue. Second, the Cuban ships were fishing in our territorial waters on February 2nd and there were fish aboard of the type caught in these waters. Third, there was no absolute evidence that the ships were dispatched or directed to national waters as against having been directed into traditional United States fishing grounds. Fourth, Cuban authorities were advised that the ships were in U.S. national waters at the time they were seized. Fifth, it should be noted that Castro's actions regarding the Guantanamo water supply took place four days after the ships were apprehended which raises some question as to whether Guantanamo was a part of the original plan.

2. Mac Bundy stated that the easiest part of the decision to be reached concerned the Florida legal problem. After hearing Meeker's briefing, the President agreed that the matter should be handled by the Florida courts as being in the nature of a first offense; that the crews would be released under temporary custody of Immigration and not fined; that the captains should be fined and that there should be no forfeiture of the vessels.

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3. On the question of Guantanamo and measures to be taken in response to Castro's act, Mr. Bundy said that the choices had narrowed down to alternatives one and two as set forth in the proposed releases. The argument centered around the question of the Base employees and the lines were quite clearly drawn. The Secretary of Defense strongly favored the dismissal of employees on the ground that only by this act could the Base be made "secure." General Taylor on balance supported the Secretary of Defense. Mr. Nitze on close balance favored not dismissing the employees but did not re-state his position in the later stage of the argument. Secretary Rusk suggested a compromise which would put special emphasis on the dollar contribution to Castro made by the Base wages.

4. The Attorney General repeated his very strong objection to the dismissal of the Base employees on the grounds that (a) it was an over-reaction to Castro's move and (b) it hurt the wrong Cubans who by and large had been loyal Base employees, some for more than a generation. Mr. McCone also opposed the dismissal on these grounds plus the fact that other countries in which we have bases might fear a similar action in the event of a disagreement with them. He also pointed out that our annual rental for Guantanamo is \$3,000. Without the economic benefits of the Base salaries, this rental figure will stand out and weaken our Guantanamo position. Mac Bundy stated that from the point of view of domestic reaction (which he said would be bad) there was little to choose between the two alternatives and that he favored alternative two.

5. The President clearly showed that he leaned toward alternative one, mainly on the ground of Base security. The argument went around again with Wilson voting for alternative two and the Secretary of State for alternative one with certain word changes. Mac Bundy at this point made a heated defense of alternative two.

6. Mr. Sorensen said that the course of the argument had indicated to him that neither alternative was adequate under the circumstances.

(7. [REDACTED])

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)

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[REDACTED]

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)

8. The President chose alternative one.

[REDACTED]

1.5(c)
3.4(b)(1)

Desmond FitzGerald
Chief, Special Affairs Staff

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